

Jewelry/Art you can wear

Continued from Page 1G

Victoria Harding, owner of the Bead Cellar shop in Pennsauken, attributes jewelry making's growing popularity to two things: It's an accessible art form and artists can show off their creations by wearing them or by seeing them on others.

"So often (the interest) starts with (the thought), 'I want to make a gift,'" said Harding.

To help would-be jewelry designers get started, Bead Cellar offers classes and will host private beading parties for people interested in learning a variety of jewelry making techniques. Basic beading, fused-glass bead making and wire working are among the classes offered. But if a formal atmosphere seems too pressure-filled, the shop's private beading parties are also a great way to explore jewelry making, Harding said.

Participants pay \$15 each for instruction, plus the cost of the beads they select. The shop provides the tools. "You reserve the space. You pick your project and you can bring your own food," Harding said.

Pennsauken resident Lynne Gunkel recently organized a jewelry making party at the Bead Cellar for herself and nine co-workers. "I've been making jewelry for a little under a year and every time I'd go in the office the girls would ask, 'Let me see what your latest creation is.' I thought, 'Let's get together and maybe you all can learn,'" said Gunkel, a Realtor.

"When we were done, everybody's piece was so unique. Some made necklaces, others bracelets. Some were chunky and others were really delicate. It's addictive and it's so much fun."

Dominique Vassallo's blossoming jewelry design business was created as a way to raise money for charity. "A year ago around this time, I was watching a Christian channel and there was an organization raising money to build a hospital in Haiti," said Vassallo. "My family is Haitian, so I said, 'I want to give.



SCOTT ANDERSON/Courier-Post

Silversmith Michele Grady examines a student's work at her Marlton home. Grady has been designing jewelry for 15 years.

What can I give?' I'm a stay-at-home mother, so I told my husband I wanted to make jewelry and he made the investment."

Though she never had tried jewelry making, Vassallo decided classes weren't for her. She began developing her style — crocheted sterling silver and yellow gold wire bracelets, necklaces and earrings with semi-precious stones strung or woven throughout — through trial and error.

"I like to think of my work as organic jewelry, because all the materials are natural and I say a prayer and let my hand be guided."

To perfect her designs, Vassallo reads magazines such as *Bead-Style* and talks with sales people at bead stores for advice.

These days, the 29-year-old Medford resident is creating commissioned pieces for a variety of

customers. Vassallo said she likes the creative energy of incorporating her customer's individual personalities into each design she creates.

"I did one bridal party where the bride liked blue topaz. (The piece) was a hanging earring and it looked very serene, like running water," Vassallo said.

Grady, who has been designing jewelry for 15 years, said one of the best parts of designing your own jewelry is it can get you free jewelry from other designers you admire. "I trade jewelry with friends who design," she explained. "Not everything I wear is mine."

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